

THE epicenter



Proud of our Veterans,
Proud of America!

Employee Newsletter of the VA Palo Alto Health Care System • 2005 • Edition 2

VISN 21 Top Network

VAPAHCS Number 2 in VA for Research



Dr. Raymond Sobel, staff neuropathologist, confers with Julian Hinojoza, life science research assistant.

and varied clinical and research settings.”

Affiliated with world-renowned Stanford University, VAPAHCS’ research continues this proud history of improving medical care for veterans and the general population while helping recruit talented and academically inclined clinicians to VA.

“The VA is particularly well suited to take the findings of researchers and translate them into new approaches to diagnose and treat the diseases of the veteran population,” said Thomas A. Rando, MD, PhD, director of VAPAHCS’ Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Center and chief of neurology. Also an associate professor at Stanford, Dr. Rando recently received the Ellison Medical Foundation Senior Scholar Award in Aging for his groundbreaking research

in the role of stem cells in age-related skeletal muscle atrophy and muscle regeneration.

According to recently released data, the VAPAHCS is now number 2 in the nation for VA research dollars. With the San Francisco VA Medical Center number 1, and other VISN 21 facilities also bringing in research dollars, the Sierra Pacific Network brought in more research dollars than any other Network in VA in 2004.

“This is wonderful news,” said Director Lisa Freeman. “VAPAHCS’ reputation for excellence in research continues to be a strong recruitment and retention tool. We truly have world-class talent in our many

in the role of stem cells in age-related skeletal muscle atrophy and muscle regeneration.

VAPAHCS offers a superior setting for our 143 investigators who seek better approaches to organizing and delivering health care and to ensure that research results promptly become a part of enhanced patient care. More than 70 percent of research investigators are also clinicians whose dual roles allow the rapid application of research results to patient care.

“It’s very true. VAPAHCS is particularly fortunate to have a broad research base, extending across the clinical services, and participating in all aspects of VA research - medical, rehabilitation, and health services research, as well as co-op studies,” said Dr. Rando. “Bottom line, our research programs provide a vibrant environment and an excellent example of integration of research with the clinical care.”

Director Freeman summed up most people’s opinions when she said, “Our research strength is at the core of what makes VAPAHCS a flagship VHA health care system.”



Life Science Research Assistant M. Jane Eaton stains tissue sections for microscopy.

Top Five VA Research Facilities

San Francisco	\$67,020,037
Palo Alto	\$51,850,101
San Diego	\$50,723,495
Baltimore	\$40,907,173
Seattle	\$38,900,447

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A Word From Our Director



**Elizabeth Joyce Freeman, Director
VA Palo Alto Health Care System**

Much to my amazement, we are rapidly approaching the mid-way point in this fiscal year. Although our present and future budget challenges remain very much in the forefront of our strategic planning, we have not allowed those challenges to compromise our performance expectations. Following our first quarter performance review with our Network Director, Dr. Wiebe, I am confident we can and will achieve outstanding results on those mea-

sures that are most representative of the quality and cost effectiveness of our care.

We continue to achieve stellar results in perhaps the most important performance measures, those on patient satisfaction. We either have or are very close to breaking through to higher levels on all the clinical practice guideline measures. We are facing significant challenges in meeting the new wait time measures in several areas, most notably, primary care, gastroenterology, orthopedics, urology, eye care and mental health. We are very close to meeting these standards in audiology and cardiology. It is clear we must embrace and employ advanced clinic access principles for efficiently operating these clinics. For my part, I will work with Dr. Ezeji-Okoye to ensure these areas are properly resourced. As far as efficiency measures, our MCCC leadership, Ms. Deborah McCormick and Mr. Chris Todaro are confident we will achieve our goal of \$16.7M in collections.

I very much appreciate and am in awe of the considerable clinical and administrative expertise that was assembled around the table at this first quarter review. Certainly VAPAHCS has the talent to overcome the highest of hurdles.

We continue to face new challenges as well. In February, Dr. Sheikh and I and several clinical and administrative staff attended a Polytrauma Summit in Washington, DC. VACO has designated the health care systems in Minneapolis, Palo Alto, Richmond and Tampa as Polytrauma Centers. Each center has an active Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Unit and most have Spinal Cord Injury and Blind Centers, as well. Dr. Perlin, Acting Under Secretary for Health, spoke to

us about the need to provide not only "technical care" in the restoration of function, but a "caring" environment of care. He said:

"The veteran and the family have high expectations and our technical skills offer rehabilitation that was impossible a few years back. But the adjustment to new realities is met with a range of emotions including anger, depression and denial. For VA to live up to our motto, veterans and their families don't just need our technical skills, they need our care."

He then outlined a number of actions HCS leadership, TBI clinical teams, Voluntary Service, Chaplain Service, Prosthetics, Public Affairs and Social Work Service should take to ensure our newest veterans and their families have access to world class clinical care and access to essential services to meet their daily needs, such as transportation, lodging and meals. We have a number of teams taking steps to implement these new requirements. In addition, Dr. Sheikh and I have asked Ms. Alice Naqvi, our HCS Nurse Executive and Chief Nurse for Rehabilitation Services, to serve as the Administrative Director for coordination of care among the rehabilitation services. Ms. Naqvi has graciously accepted this new responsibility and has already spearheaded a number of efforts to ensure care across the rehabilitation services is seamless.

We will also streamline our procedures for accepting patients from DoD so that all four Polytrauma Centers use the same procedures. We will expand our use of video teleconferencing to introduce our care teams to the patient's family prior to their transfer. We will make available more extensive information about the care team and VAPAHCS prior to their arrival. We will have extensive welcome packets for the families and will more formally greet them and ensure their needs as far as accommodations are met. From support we hope to receive from the community, we will make every effort to provide access to leisure activities for them.

DoD has committed to have a fulltime presence at VAPAHCS to assist active duty service members and their families. We have seen a tremendous outpouring of compassion and resources from the community in support of our Fisher House Fund and our Family Support Fund.

I believe we are meeting, and will continue to meet, the needs of our OIF and OEF service members and their families. I am proud of the many extraordinary efforts so many of you have made already. I appreciate your continued efforts to strengthen and improve these programs.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Elizabeth J. Freeman". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Elizabeth Joyce Freeman
Director

Mediation Program Is the First Step for Resolving Issues

VAPAHCS and the Local Partnership Committee (LPC) are committed to providing employees at all levels with a work environment that enables them to deliver quality patient care and services to the nation's veterans. To do this, employees must have access to effective and efficient mechanisms for resolving workplace disputes including, but not limited to, those involving complaints of discrimination, grievances, and other workplace issues with employees, and/or management.

Mediation is recognized as a problem-solving process that promotes principles and practices that will facilitate communication and improve working relationships. It is a confidential, impartial, cost-effective, informal process, and allows parties to resolve their differences quickly.

The VAPAHCS Mediation Program is available on a voluntary basis and a request for mediation must be mutually agreed upon by all parties. Managers and supervisors are encouraged to consider mediation as an alternate form of conflict resolution in the workplace and to use the program themselves.

When mediation is requested, a two-person mediation team is appointed to work with the parties. Mediators are VA employees who have volunteered to serve as mediators, and who have received special training in mediator skills, conflict resolution techniques, and other ways to help disputing parties resolve their problems. Mediators simply provide a structured process that enables parties to exchange information, listen to opposing positions, and jointly consider mutually acceptable solutions to their dispute.

The Secretary's Strategic Plan, FY 2003-2008, states "VA will conduct Mediation Awareness Training for all employees to ensure that employees are aware of the mediation tools that can be used to effectively resolve workplace conflicts and disputes." This training began in August 2004, when all employees were asked to view a 30-minute video called "Mediation Zone" and to certify completion of this "one-time only" training. All employees should complete this training, which is available on the Mediation Program web page at: [http://vaww.palo-](http://vaww.palo-alto.med.va.gov/intranet/show.asp?durki=812)



Chuck Revell

Top row (left to right): Michael James, Ed Bastille, Thalia Falcon, Sherry Riney, Jimmie Witcher, Caroline Wyman and Lori Russo.

Bottom row (left to right): Laura Peters, Mary Dew and Shirley Salom-Bail. **Not Pictured:** Loutricia Coulter, Alice Espindola, Julie Harper, Susan Hyder, David James, Geraldine Root Mauthe, Robyn Medcalf, Lori Peery, Marc Samuels, and David Seegers

alto.med.va.gov/intranet/show.asp?durki=812, within 30 days of starting work.

If you are interested in obtaining further information about the program, a Request for Mediation form, the VISN 21 Mediation Program Policy Statement 10N21-06, or other program information, please visit the Mediation Program web page at: <http://vaww.palo-alto.med.va.gov/intranet/show.asp?durki=812>. If you have any questions about the Mediation Program, or would like to request mediation, please contact Ms. Lori Russo, Mediation Program Coordinator, at ext. 66726.

Masonic Clowns Join Miss California for National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans



Long-time VAPAHCS volunteer, Irv Cohen (far left) joins his fellow Masonic clowns and 2004 Miss California, Veena Goel, to pass out valentines and many smiles to veterans throughout Palo Alto, Livermore and Menlo Park during National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans week. The program is sponsored and coordinated by Bill Ball (far right) chief, Voluntary Service. Literally hundreds of valentines were made by local school children and church groups and distributed to our veterans. Many thanks to everyone – especially all the volunteers – who spent many hours of hard work to make it happen.

Occupational Therapy: *Serving Our Nation's Veterans Since WWI*



Curt Campbell

Working to rehabilitate our veterans since World War I, and embracing the idea that “you are what you do,” occupational therapy might best be understood as the “doing therapy.” Occupational therapists (OT) assess an individual’s ability to participate in everyday activities such as dressing, cooking, and balancing a checkbook. OTs use and adapt these everyday activities to improve function, prevent disability, and increase independence.

VAPAHCS’ 25 occupational therapists work in many diverse areas including spinal cord injury, computer assistive technology, neuro-rehabilitation, hand therapy, hospice, home care, acute care, long-term care, gero-psychiatry, outpatient services, driver rehabilitation, ergonomics, and research. In addition, occupational therapists in the community commonly work with children in the school system and with seniors in adult day programs.

“Working as an OT in the Spinal Cord Injury Unit (SCI) over many years has been a wonderful experience,” said Janet Weis, OTR/L. “It’s a pleasure getting to know the patients and their families, and the rapport that develops and continuity of care over a patient’s lifetime makes this a unique setting. The SCI is like a family with a strong supportive interdisciplinary team. After initial rehabilitation,

I continue to work with many patients during their yearly medical check-ups or outpatient visits. These patients and families share their joys and sorrows and must deal with the inevitable aging process. A trust develops over the years, allowing patients and families to be more receptive towards therapy recommendations. I am fortunate to have a job that I enjoy and find rewarding and challenging.”

The Occupational Therapy Department celebrated OT month by hosting an informational booth and clothing drive April 13. All donated clothing was given to the VAPAHCS Clothing Room. To find out more about OT, please ask a therapist or visit the American Occupational Therapy Association website at www.aota.org.



Curt Campbell



Curt Campbell

(Above left) Traumatic Brain Injury occupational therapist Daniela Lita reads over a recipe with service member Jared Diaz to ensure he understands the instructions before starting to cook.

(Above) Karen Parecki, OTR/L, CBIS, practices hand coordination with veteran Carl Zepeda.

(Left) Front row, left to right: Janet Weis, Angela Castro, Sherri Dekelboun, Calvin Herrick, Karen Parecki, Carrie Borella, Daniela Lita, Eric Lipton.

Back row, left to right: Keri Ojeda, Shonduel, Carol Hawthorne, Marc Samuels, Gary Meregillano, Louise Hess, Jean Gurga, Barbara Bradley, Linda Bober, Judy Lew, Dorothy Stearns, Tim Chin, Janice Kishi Chow. Therapists not pictured: Christina Hays, Judy Fong, Linda Yonenaga

AASEP Celebrates Kwanzaa, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. & Black History Month

by Tonora Shannon

In December, the African American Special Emphasis Program (AASEP) held its first annual Kwanzaa Celebration at VAPAHCS. Normally celebrated from December 26 to January 1, Kwanzaa focuses on traditional African values of family, community responsibility, commerce, and self-improvement through seven guiding principles known as Nguzo Saba.

Many thanks to the members and guests who made this celebration a huge success: Deborah Grizzard, RN, Chief Nurse of Psychiatry gave

the opening remarks. The Tabia Theater Ensemble gave a great performance. Our guest speaker, the Rev. Barbara Bowman (Youth Minister from Allen Temple Baptist Church, Oakland), had us all spell-bound; and the AASEP African-



American Heritage Choir performed.

Other participants included Rev. Virginia Jackson, James Canfield, Donna Harris, Will Nichols (retired VA), Tommie Lampley, Nelson Spalding, Harriet Johnson, Marian Askew, and Tonora Shannon. The Kwanzaa week ended with a wonderful celebration and feast.

In January, we all celebrated the life of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. with the theme "We Can Not Turn Back," which was more than a theme as we passed the baton from our past manager to the new manager of AASEP. Jim Canfield, after serving two wonderful years as our manager, passed the duty to Tonora Shannon with a parting comment to the group, "If she does not run away, here is your new AASEP manager." Ms. Shannon said, "Well Mr. Canfield has left some large shoes for me to fill, but with the committee's help and your support, we hope to have some wonderful, educational, enlightening, and inspiring programs ahead."

We also participated in other Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. observance programs. Fredrick Williams, Safety Officer VAPAHCS, spoke at both Palo Alto and Livermore, and if you closed your eyes, you would have thought you were listening to Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. He made it personal and left us uplifted. Our guest speaker, Ms. Jacqueline Bates, delivered a wonderful dissertation on the Rev. King. She came to us via The Martin Luther King, Jr. Association of Santa Clara County, which hosted the Freedom Train for the past 15 years.

During February, Black History Month, the AASEP held programs at Menlo Park, Livermore, and Palo Alto facilities. In Livermore, Victor Harris, Environmental Management, spoke on baseball's Negro

Leagues. Tony Fitzgerald, chief of Environmental Management, spoke on the Niagara Movement and the beginning of the NAACP; and the Tabia Theater Ensemble gave a performance. At the Menlo Park and Palo Alto sites, Grandmothers Who Help provided a wonderful display and oral presentation by Asale Kimaada.

With programs like the ones above, the AASEP aims to provide an educational and enjoyable experience for patients, employees, volunteers, and the surrounding community. In July, we will present Minority Organ Donor Awareness Day. If you would like to join our committee, we meet at noon on the last Wednesday of each month in the anesthesiology conference room 3rd floor, bldg 101, PAD.



(Above) Employees join together for the Kwanzaa Celebration and Feast last December. Left to right: Harriet Johnson, Research (Nia); Will Nichols, VA retired (Ujima); Tonora Shannon, Research (Imani); Donna Harris, Medicine (Umoja and Kujichagulia); Tommie Lampley, Acquisition Material Management (Ujamaa); and Marian Askew, Medicine (Kuumba).

(Above left) James Canfield introduces Tonora Shannon as the new African-American Special Emphasis Program Manager during the Martin Luther King Observance Day Program in January.

Thank you to the AASEP Committee

Marian Askew, Medicine; Carlina Coulter, Environmental Mgmt;
Kenneth Danley, Environmental Mgmt;
Tommie Lampley, Materiel Management;
Frances Maynord, Environmental Mgmt;
Tonora Shannon, Research; T. June Willis, Medicine;
James Canfield, Medicine; Donna Harris, Medicine;
Wanda Holland, Nursing; Mynra Horton, Nursing
Harriet Johnson, Research; Ruby Johnson, Nursing;
Will Nichols, VA retired

Steve Chinn Takes Over as Chief, Quality Management



Chuck Revell

Dr. Steve Chinn joined VAPAHCS in May 2004 as the assistant quality manager. Prior to working here, he was the director of Performance Improvement and Risk Management at Fremont Hospital, Calif. for three years. He was also a surveyor and consultant for the Joint Commission (JCAHO) in Oakbrook Terrace, Ill., for seven years in the hospital, ambulatory, behavioral health, and network accreditation programs. He has been a consultant to numerous health care organizations, including NASA, DOD, VHA, Indian Health Services, and academic health centers and community hospitals across the country.

Dr. Chinn has also served as vice president and dean for Clinical Affairs at the California College of Podiatric Medicine, San Francisco. Prior to being involved in hospital administration, he was in private practice in San Francisco and Sonoma counties. He was also a clinical assistant professor at UCSF Department of Medicine.

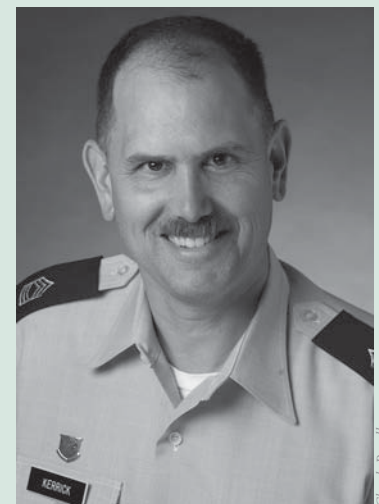
A Diplomate of the American Board of Podiatric Orthopedics and Primary Podiatric Medicine, Dr. Chinn earned a doctorate in Podiatric Medicine and a master of Podiatric Surgical Education at the California College of Podiatric Medicine. Additionally, he is a Certified Healthcare Executive (CHE) by the American College of Healthcare Executives, Certified Professional in Healthcare Quality (CPHQ), and Certified Professional in Healthcare Risk Management (CPHRM) by the American Hospital Association.

VAPAHCS Gets a Full-Time DoD Liaison

VAPAHCS is proud to welcome Army MSgt. Steven Kerrick, who began mid-March as our first full-time Military Liaison with DoD. An Army medic, he has been in the service for 24 years, serving in numerous roles to include respiratory therapy for 15 years. Most recently he was assigned to Madigan Army Medical Center, Ft. Lewis, Wash., as the chief clinical NCO for nursing. MSgt. Kerrick will be at VAPAHCS for the next six months and will be assisting in the coordination of all active duty service members that are being transferred here for rehabilitative care and outpatient care.

The Military Liaison office is located in building 7 in the BIRU area, B-124C. MSgt. Kerrick's extension is 62526.

"I am here to provide support to the active duty members and their families as they transition from military care to VA," said MSgt. Kerrick. "I will be your subject matter expert for military issues and will be able to provide education, information and referrals to service members and their families on issues pertaining to military benefits and services. If you have any questions or need any assistance please call or email me in outlook."



Chuck Revell

EMPLOYEE NEWS (MARCH)

New Employees

Blind Rehab Svc.
El Gray
Nancy J Mackenzie

Medical Svc.
James John Helmer

Nursing Svc.
Loretta C Regan

Phys Med & Rehab
Marvin E Angeles
Eva J Corralejo
Mortell S Delos Trinos
Alison H Taba

Radiology Svc.
Mary J Gagne

Research Svc.
Christian O Punzalan

Retirees

Patricia Allyn (24)
Director's Office

Barbara Buscema-Najera (30)
Nursing Svc.

Josefina Cayetano (19)
Pharmacy Svc.

Ruth Ford (42)
Nutrition & Food Svc.

Erlinda Lintao (27)
Nursing Svc.

Anita Monteagudo (31)
Nursing Svc.

Arthur Reichstadt (34)
Social Work Svc.

Joseph Russo (37)
Director's Office

Juanita Whetstone (44)
Nutrition & Food Svc.

(Years of service are indicated in parentheses.)

Employee Service Awards

10 Years

Anthony Gaudino
Police Svc.

Johnny Gonzalez
Police Svc.

Suresh Kumar
Nursing Svc.

Sherna Madan
Spinal Cord Injury Svc.

Colleen Oelkers
Nursing Svc.

Judith Stevens
Psychiatry Svc.

15 Years

Curtis Askew
Nursing Svc.

Emmanuel Buenviaje
Nursing Svc.

David Desilva
A&MMS

Paula Edwards
Chief of Staff

Michael Ellis
Medical Svc.

Victor Harris
Environmental Mgmt. Svc.

Sherri Heim
Recreation Therapy Svc.

Seraphina Jang
Nursing Svc.

Faye Johnson
Social Work Svc.

Justo Mationg
Pharmacy Svc.

Jennifer Meachem
Nursing Svc.

Kevin Miller
Chief of Staff

Pauline Rodriguez
San Jose Vet Center

Donalyn Warden
Blind Rehab Svc.

20 Years

Tony Adamo
A&MMS

Yolanda Adams
Nursing Svc.

Nancy Bishop-Abney
Director's Office

Gerald Georgette
Medical Svc.

Consuelo King
Nursing Svc.

Keith Okamuro
Phys Med & Rehab Svc.

Marta Raygoza
Medical Svc.

Joanne Weith
Nursing Svc.

Kimmie Wong
Nursing Svc.

25 Years

Shirley Abraham
Nursing Svc.

Hermينو Adriano
Nursing Svc.

Mark Floding
Nursing Svc.

Sallie Lafleur
Nursing Svc.

Betty Tolbert
Nursing Svc.

30 Years

Jacqueline Bevins
Human Resources

Gilbert Catano
Human Resources

Pat Martinez
Nursing Svc.

Oliver Neal
Engineering Svc.

Wilma Palaganas
Nursing Svc.

James Skelton
Psychology Svc.

Larry Vellinga
IRMS

35 Years

Mickey Jones
Nutrition & Food Svc.

Kendall Lok
Pharmacy Svc.

EMPLOYEE NEWS (APRIL)

New Employees

Acq. & Mat. Mgmt Svc.
Joyce E Stevenson

Ambulatory Care
Samantha M Rios

Canteen Svc.
Delores J Rowen

Nursing Svc.
Marsha K Anderson
Curtis L Briscoe
Cara Lee Holm
Michael J Mapp

Nutrition & Food Svc.
Alton L Cole

Radiology Svc.
Shivani A Buch
Belinda I Quintanilla

Research Svc.
Amber M Bailey
Rona Margaret V Relova

Social Work Svc.
Kim M Wilder

Retirees

Toni Lee (12)
Nursing Svc.

Eileen Mitchell (28)
Nutrition & Food Svc.

Sam Nichols (26)
Pharmacy Svc.

Joe Sanchez (33)
Engineering Svc.

Alan Syslo (7)
Social Work Svc.

Elaine Weighill (15)
Nursing Svc.

(Years of service are indicated in parentheses.)

Employee Service Awards

10 Years

Altonio Gregory
Anesthesiology Svc.

Lyn Lazar
Medical Svc.

James Mason
Nursing Svc.

15 Years

Lourdes Albano
Surgical Svc.

Kenneth Coleman
Chaplain Svc.

Margaret Haze
Nursing Svc.

Lonnie Howard
Medical Svc.

Mary Jane Jackson
Nursing Svc.

Crispin Leano
Dental Svc.

Tim Maynard
Chief of Staff

Monika Muller-Eberhard
Social Work Svc.

Lelia Navarro
Nursing Svc.

Freddie Percell
Nursing Svc.

Premila Prasad
Nursing Svc.

Zaida Ugalde
Nursing Svc.

20 Years

Eric Kofoed
Nursing Svc.

Victoria Layton
Business Office

Rodina Maerina
Nursing Svc.

Edward Minglana
Nutrition & Food Svc.

Thearesa Minix
A&MMS

Daniel Newkirk
A&MMS

Carolyn Odom
Nursing Svc.

25 Years

Randy Osheroff
IRMS

30 Years

Efren Alarcon
Fiscal Svc.

Amanda Din
Nutrition & Food Svc.

Michael Rodriguez
A&MMS

Jerome Yesavage
Psychiatry Svc.

35 Years

Elizabeth Mastracchio
Nutrition & Food Svc.

News from DC ...

New Vision and Dental Coverage Approved

The House on Dec. 6 approved the Federal Employee Dental and Vision Benefits Enhancement Act, which establishes a voluntary program under which federal employees and annuitants can purchase dental and vision coverage. The House vote represented final Congressional approval of the bill, which will now be sent to participate would be responsible for 100 percent of the premium cost but would benefit from group rates.

Congress Eliminates TSP Open Season

Congress has approved a plan to give federal employees more access to the Thrift Savings Plan. Currently, feds can only join the TSP or make changes to their contributions during open seasons. This new bill eliminates open seasons so you can join, made changes, or end contributions at any time.

Controlled Substance Inspections

Ask our inspectors about their experience with the new controlled substance inspection process, and they will tell you that it is not easy.

In August 2004, VAPAHCS reorganized their monthly controlled substance inspection (CSI) program to comply with changes made by VHA. The revised inspection process includes both a routine inventory check and a review of potential diversion. We trained and certified a total of 74 employees as Controlled Substance Inspectors. Each month, an inspector spends approximately one full day completing a detailed inspection of controlled substances (Schedule II-V) in one of 102 locations throughout the hospital including wards, the pharmacy, clinics, CBOCs, and research areas.

The process starts with the inspector entering an area and announcing that there is to be a controlled substance inspection. These random and unannounced inspections require everyone involved (nurse, pharmacy technician, or researcher) to postpone their normal responsibilities and comply with the inspector.

Depending on the area, the inspection could take from five hours to a full eight-hour day.

The inspector along with area personnel must complete a physical count of all the area's controlled substances. Imagine doing an inventory of over 100 different controlled substances in the pharmacy vault. Also, the inspector must verify source data like prescriptions, provider orders, and BCMA records to detect potential diversion. All this is then documented in a report to the controlled substance coordinator who provides monthly inspection updates to the director.

Recently, VAPAHCS underwent a Combined Assessment Program review with the VA Office of Inspector General who acknowledged considerable progress in our inspection process. In appreciation for the positive strides made in our controlled substance inspections, the director is recognizing all those involved at an appreciation luncheon in April.

(Above right) Ami Liang, RN carefully counts pills as CSI Ruby Johnson ensures the number corresponds to the records.

(Right) Inspector Catherine Morris (right), monitors and documents controlled substances at the Mental Health Clinic with Mary Marrow, RN.



Curt Campbell



Kerri Childress

Employee to Employee

Jerry Duncan Puts Heart Into His Work By Brian Higgins, WBRC

From the first moment I met creative arts therapist Jerry Duncan at the Western Blind Rehabilitation Center (WBRC), I was impressed. Responsible for recreation activities for veterans who are blind and visually impaired, his trips quickly become one of the most memorable experiences during a veteran's rehabilitation. He plays a key role in integrating people who are blind and visually impaired back into society and takes his work to heart.



Brian Higgins

"Heart." That is what Elizabeth Jessen, the chief, WBRC, had to say about Jerry. "He goes the extra mile for the students here."

Jerry takes veterans on outings to the zoo in the city, fishing at Monterey Bay, to museums, cultural events, dining at countless restaurants around the area, and hundreds of different events. He also hosts dances, karaoke, bowling, exercise, picnics and casino night. He is always working on unique recreation activities for the center's veterans. One example is the herb garden he started at Menlo Park. The herbs made their way into olive oils and vinegar that the veterans bottled just in time for the Palo Alto VA's Country Store. His olive oil idea was a huge success at the country store. The story was unique enough for an article to be written in the San Jose Mercury News.

Jerry's caring and creativity make the month a veteran stays here very enjoyable. Food is one of his specialties. I have gone on several trips with Jerry and the students and have seen many a good buffet and meals put on by local service organizations.

The WRBC is one of the most unique places that I have worked, and Jerry Duncan is the most gregarious, sincere, and humorous addition to the organization.

The Heart of the Medical Team

Lab Services Staff are the Unsung Heroes of Veterans Health Care

By Allan Johnson, Volunteer

Two and a half million times every year, almost 7,000 times every day, nearly 300 times every hour, Dr. Luis Fajardo, chief, Pathology and Laboratory Medicine Service (P&LMS), and his staff perform and evaluate tests for VAPAHCS doctors, and they must get it right. Every time. Because when front-line caregivers get it right, it means the part



Curt Campbell

Clinical Lab Scientist Mike Gire analyzes blood samples to determine complete blood counts.

of the Laboratory team in E Wing has been busy giving them the diagnostic tools to do so.

Although the P&LMS tests all kinds of specimen tissues in all kinds of ways, perhaps the best way to describe a “typical” test is to start with a veteran sitting down with an affable and highly trained phlebotomist. Phlebotomists have gracious manners, steady hands, sanitizing alcohol swabs, and hollow needles – because they are the people who draw blood. The blood samples are labeled and sent to the laboratory where they are racked and placed on a processor in a machine that is equal parts conveyor belt, traffic cop, robotic thing-a-majig, and workload sorter and soon to become computerized, automated testing genius.

The Clinical Lab Scientists who perform tests in the lab would be hard pressed to perform this much of a workload without automation, so it's a good thing they don't have to. Their input is largely analytical evaluative in this state-of-the-art facility, but this constitutes the perfect relationship between human and machine: both parties doing what they do best. Automation gives consistency, speed and volume, but it is still the technologists who analyze the data and are the detectives who find test inconsistencies.

The sample is spun by a little machine so the barcode identifying it can be read, then it moves down a little metal hallway sort of like Leroy Jetson going to the third grade, then it takes a left or a right depending on which particular tests are going to be run. It might be spun in a centrifuge or it might get poked with a special chemical probe and it will, probably at some point, get picked up by the robot arm and placed exactly where it needs to go someplace else for more tests – up to 10 chemical tests per sample – before the automation and inter-related computers are finished and a technician or scientist looks at the report. Each sample might take five minutes to move through the system on a conveyor carrying dozens of samples simultaneously.

The various sections and departments within the P&LMS are specialties offering their own diagnostic tools for the care of veterans. I met with Dr. Luis Fajardo, Chief of P&LMS who described the overall work of pathologists, cytologists histologists and autopsy assistants. Mary Cox, Laboratory Manager, administrative technologist, walked me through the various labs and tried her best to explain everything – the Chemistry lab, the Blood Bank, Hematology, the Immunology lab, the Microbiology lab, the Molecular Pathology lab – and I might make a B+ if she were to test me on everything, but the main impression I got was that VAPAHCS has wisely invested a lot of money and time in the staff and technology necessary to provide laboratory support as quickly, as accurately, and as efficiently as possible.

Although the professionals in the P&LMS operate mostly behind the scenes, they know just how important their technical detective work

(continued on page 11)



Curt Campbell

Rodney Williams, clinical lab scientist, oversees the robotic instrument that processes the laboratory blood specimens.



Dr. Luis Fajardo, chief of P&LMS, brings family members together after their loved one has passed away to discuss the nature of death amid a team of doctors and nurses.

(continued from page 10)

is, and they are proud of the work they do. This is readily apparent in the newest section of the laboratory- Molecular Pathology. Even if you don't know biochemistry, everyone knows something about this testing area from the recent court cases about DNA testing or the biotechnology stock page of the newspaper. At VAPAHCS, two types of testing are performed if a patient is positive for Hepatitis C or HIV. One test is to determine the virus genotype, which helps the physician know which drugs to use and how well a patient will respond to therapy, and the other is to monitor "viral load" or "quantity" of the virus. This helps the physician know if the drugs are effective. Since this testing is still new and expensive, testing of all VISN 21 samples has been centralized at VAPAHCS.

Our veterans, in whatever location they may happen to reside, all have access to the same laboratory quality. Even though specimens are collected in San Jose, Menlo Park, Stockton, Sonoma, Monterey or Modesto, they all travel back to the Palo Alto or Livermore testing laboratories via the VA shuttle systems. And since each clinic is linked (via "computer roads") to the main site, all lab orders and all results are available to providers wherever they may be.

Another innovative and important program operated by the P&LMS is so different from what they normally offer and so important for the families of veterans that it has been recognized nationally for its exceptional service: the Family Autopsy Conference.

That veterans die while in the hospital is a fact that is impossible to avoid. When it happens at VAPAHCS, Dr. Fajardo's staff bring family members and friends together to discuss the nature of death amid the loving teamwork of family and doctors and nurses. According to Dr. Fajardo, "This helps people realize they have done the best for their relatives and answers any questions they may have."

VAPAHCS is proud to celebrate National Medical Laboratory Week beginning on April 24th. This year's theme is "Laboratory Professionals: The Heart of the Medical Team."

Joanne Joki Takes Grand Prize

Grand Prize went to Joanne Joki for her painting of a horse during a recent competition at Menlo Park. Joki, VAPAHCS and VISN 21 workforce development coordinator, joined other employees and veterans to exhibit their artistic talents at the Creative Arts Festival, March 16. Joki not only paints but is an accomplished sculptor, as well. Congratulations to all the winners and special thanks to Recreation Therapy staff for their work in coordinating this event.



VAPAHCS Becomes a Colon Cancer-Free Zone

The "Colon Cancer-Free Zone" is a national campaign initiated by the American Cancer Society to build zones in cities, hospitals, and other groups to increase awareness of colorectal cancer and remind people to get screened.

Dr. Sherry Wren, chief of General Surgery, has spearheaded the effort to create a colon cancer-free zone at VAPAHCS. "It's such an easy thing to get screened and there are a variety of tests which can be done. This could really impact your life or a loved one's, so please talk to your doctor," said Dr. Wren.

Colon cancer, a very slow growing disease, is treatable and curable 90% of the time when detected and treated early. Because of an aversion to being tested, only 39% of colorectal cancers are caught early compared to 70% for prostate cancer.

It kills over 56,000 Americans each year, which is more than either breast cancer or AIDS, and it is the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths.

We encourage all VAPAHCS employees and staff to talk to their doctor about screening for the simple reason that testing can save lives. Early screening can even prevent the disease by removing non-cancerous growths called polyps before they turn cancerous. Routine screening should begin at age 50 and even earlier if you have a family history of colon cancer.

VAPAHCS employs 3,153 people with nearly 1,500 over the age of 50. The goal is to have 100% of this at risk group discuss screening with their physicians and get screened, this could save their lives by early detection and treatment.



Colon Cancer Free Zone

VAPAHCS Performs World Class Nursing Research

In 2001, the 2A/Telemetry Nurses Staff embarked on a three-year research project studying the effectiveness of increased therapeutic time on patient and staff satisfaction. The project titled "Patient and Staff Outcomes of an Effective Nursing Presence" replicated a study previously performed at Cedar Sinai Hospital. VAPAHCS Nurse Manager, David Renfro, obtained resources from Marty Douglas, Associate Chief of Nursing Research, and formed a nursing team to plan and implement the research. The nursing team confirmed that they could support the research in conjunction with their normal duties, and they enrolled 120 patients into the study.

GRECC Celebrates 30 Years of Service

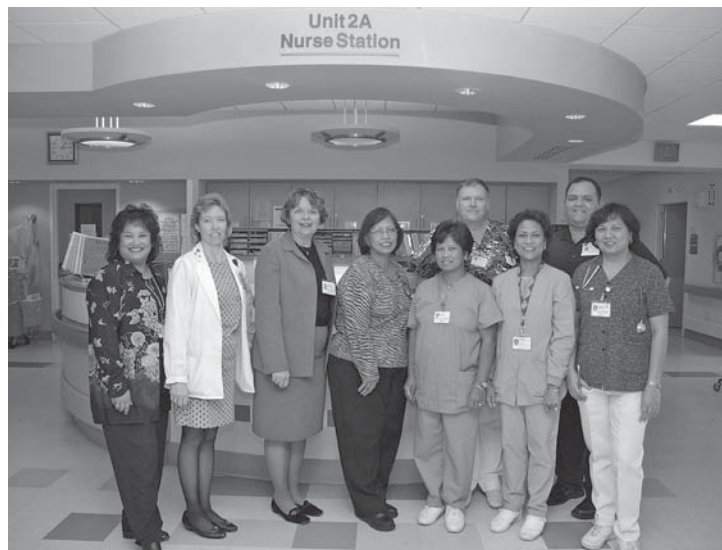
The VAPAHCS' Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center (GRECC) celebrates its 30th Anniversary this year! The GRECC, located in Building 4 of the Palo Alto Division, was designated in 1975. It is one of 21 "Centers of Geriatric Excellence" located around the country, designed for the advancement and integration of research, education, and clinical achievements in geriatrics and gerontology into the total VA healthcare system.

GRECC focuses on the quality of life and care for the aging veteran. They are at the forefront of leading edge research and education whose results influence therapies for diseases affecting older veterans and others beyond the veteran community.

VA Research Week, March 27 to April 2, is designed to honor the achievements of VA researchers in providing high quality care for veterans and advancing medical science. It also serves to educate veterans, the public, and media about the research being conducted at our health care system and its impact on treating and preventing disease and disability.

Thomas A. Rando, MD, PhD, Director of GRECC and Chief of Neurology, is the recipient of the Ellison Medical Foundation Senior Scholar Award on Aging. This award recognizes Dr. Rando's groundbreaking research on aging. He studies the role of stem cells in age-related skeletal muscle atrophy and muscle regeneration. His research will advance the development of therapies to prevent or reduce age-related muscle atrophy and to enhance muscle regeneration. Dr. Rando is an Associate Professor, Department of Neurology and Neurological Sciences, at Stanford University School of Medicine.

The GRECC will continue to serve as a resource in aging research, education and clinical care for VAPAHCS, other VA facilities in VISN 21 and the VA system as a whole. Please visit our web page on VAPAWEB at: <http://www.palo-alto.med.va.gov/show.asp?durki=851> for further information.



Left to right: Shirley Paulson, Laura Markman, Sandy Parkes, Eleanor Basilio, Lettie Sana, John Dunavan, Emelda Kalkbrenner, David Renfro and Josephine Mendoza.

The research project team then set out to test the results of the previous study that showed increasing nursing therapeutic time spent with a patient by only five minutes during each 8-hour shift could:

- Improve patient satisfaction with the quality of nursing care
- Improve staff satisfaction with the care-giving aspect of their practice.

The findings were very impressive:

1. 83.6% of experimental patients stated that they got their questions answered in a way they could understand compared to 77% of the control patients
2. 62.6% of experimental patients rated their nurses as excellent compared to 54.4% of control patients
3. 100% of both groups felt they were treated with respect and dignity.
4. The study's largest impact was on the growth and morale of the nursing staff. The job enjoyment scale comparison showed a 50% growth in their enthusiasm in their work, and their impressions of the care their fellow nurses provided increased by 58%.

"This nursing unit put in a lot of hard work to prove their commitment to nursing research and the philosophy of creating an evidence-based practice to improve care for our veterans," said David Renfro. Renfro also wishes to thank Sandra Parkes, Laura Markman and Shirley Paulson for their commitment, support and leadership from the beginning to the completion of this study.

Congratulations 2A/Telemetry Staff!

Fisher House Will Soon Become Reality

Last month, Cadence Design Systems, Inc. announced that our Fisher House project was selected as the 2005 recipient of the Cadence Stars and Strikes fundraiser. As a result, the Fisher Foundation has written a letter to the Secretary of VA announcing they would like to build a 21-room Fisher House at Palo Alto, and VAPAHCS will hopefully break ground in early summer – if not sooner.

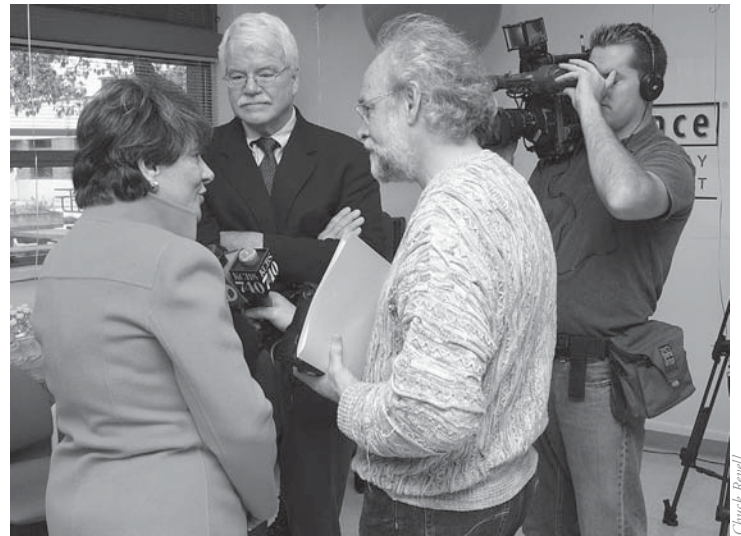
The announcement was made during a press conference on the traumatic brain injury unit, along with staff and patients from the spinal cord unit. Special guests included Congresswoman Anna Eshoo, Congressman George Miller and Cadence Executive Chairman Ray Bingham. Four TV stations, two newspapers and one radio station covered the event.



Headquartered in San Jose, Cadence, the world's largest electronic design software provider, has been raising money to meet community needs since 1990 through its annual Stars & Strikes fundraiser and bowling tournament.

With the fundraising expenses underwritten by Cadence, Stars & Strikes is one of the largest community events of its kind in Silicon Valley. During this event, Cadence's partners in business come together as part-

ners in the community and every dollar raised together then goes directly to the beneficiary. To date, more than \$5.8 million has been raised through this program, most of which has been used to fund major programs and projects that provide significant benefits to local



(Above) Congresswoman Anna Eshoo and Congressman George Miller talk with a KCBS radio reporter, while an NBC cameraman shoots the interview during a press conference to announce new Fisher House funding.

(Left) Cadence executive chairman Ray Bingham speaking at the press conference.

non-profit organizations and charities. The San Francisco 49ers Foundation, which teamed with Cadence to provide the star power last year, will once again bring out players and coaches for the big event in 2005. "Making the Fisher House in Palo Alto a reality is a wonderful example of what the corporate community can do when we work together," said Bingham, whose father was cared for at VAPAHCS. "This project will benefit many families of our servicemen and women for years to come."

Menlo Park Veterans Donate \$500 for Tsunami Relief



A group of veterans at the Nursing Home Care Unit at Menlo Park recently presented a check for more than \$500 to a Red Cross volunteer. Called the Friendly Social Group, the 18 men and women presented the check to Mary Carson, a 15-year volunteer at the NHCU and a volunteer with the Red Cross since WWII. Staff and residents all gathered for presentation. "It was a group effort," said Chairman Bernard (Ski) Bonezewski. "It's a pleasure for me to present the check to such a wonderful lady and a fine organization like the Red Cross. We want folks to know that we are still viable members of our society and can help where needed."

You Make a Difference!

Submitted by our veterans and their families



"I want to commend an excellent employee, Nurse's Aid **Erano Carino**, for his constant caring and diligent attention to me and my roommate. Having employees like Mr. Carino look after us makes our healing time pleasurable and so much faster. And thank you **Mrs. Raj Balancia** for the obvious good training and supervision you extend to your staff."

— A Veteran

"Terri Hammock Babendir does her work with outstanding enthusiasm. As a pulmonary function technologist she does her job with absolute clarity by way of self demonstrations of the tasks to be done by the patient. She is truly a dedicated employee."

— A Veteran



"Social worker **Monika Mueller-Eberhard** made an extra effort for my smooth transition to the board and care home I needed to move to. I have felt supported and she followed through on my wishes to be more comfortable and helped me get into the neighborhood I wanted to live in. She listened to me about my physical complaints and believed me when I told her about my experiences. She never doubted my word. I was taken seriously and was well cared for, not neglected. She also encouraged me to take care of myself, and I am very grateful for all she has done for me."

— A Veteran

"Tim Langford is relatively new to the Blind Rehab Center at Palo Alto, but he is not new to providing excellent customer service to anyone he works with. While assisting a distinguished elderly veteran, who is in her late 80s, blind and in a wheelchair, to the airport, Tim not only made sure that airport personnel could assist her, but got clearance to go to the boarding area to make sure that she would be able to have her bag lunch that was provided by the hospital. Finding that there was not a table for her to set out her lunch, he sat with her and assisted her with her meal. Actions like this are as important as any of the valuable rehab skills we teach and make a big impact on the lives of those we serve."

— A Veteran



"We would like to thank all of the staff of **Palo Alto Hospice** for the care and attention received by my brother. We spoke with some of the staff several times and it was obvious our brother was receiving the best possible tender loving care. We know that when he entered Hospice, he said, 'I've landed in heaven!'"

— A Veteran's Family Member

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